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THE EVOLUTION OF THE NIBELUNGENSAGA

The results which are contained in the present study were essentially reached by me some twenty years ago and were embodied in a paper which I read before the Philological Association of Stanford University in 1898. This paper formed a part of a series of studies in the history of the Siegfried-legend which remained unpublished, partly because I became interested in other lines of research, partly because my conclusions contained so many heresies that it seemed wise not to rush into print with them before I had subjected them to further tests. I now regret that I did not publish these studies at the time when they were written, for shortly afterwards Heusler and later Boer, Neckel and Pollak, following different methods of investigation, obtained results similar to those which I had reached. Among these I mention the rejection of the Lachmann-Müllenhoff theory of the mythological origin of the Siegfried-legend, the elimination as documentary source-material for the origin of this legend of certain Eddapoems such as Gríspǫ, Reginsmǫl, parts of Fáfnismǫl, Sigrdrifomǫl and Helreið Brynhildar, and finally the demonstration of the fact that the primitive form of the Siegfried-legend is an old story of the murder of relatives or, as Boer afterwards expressed the same idea in his *Untersuchungen über den Ursprung und die Entwicklung der Nibelungensage*. Vol. I p. 7: "die Sigfrid Sage (ist) eine Sage vom Verwandtenmord."

Most investigators of the history of the hero-legend and the Nibelungensaga in particular, have approached the subject from the point of view of the history of the subject-matter, the Stoffgeschichte, assuming the existence of a general saga as a fixed quantity from which the poets at different periods drew, and which is capable of a reconstruction from the various poetic fragments, just as we construe an Indogermanic or a Pregermanic parent-speech by the comparison of related dialects. At the time when the mythological dogma still predominated, the interpretation consisted of reading a so-called 'deeper' or 'real' meaning into the single poetic documents by postulating a Germanic hero-myth, according to which the single heroic figures such as Siegfried, Hagen, Beowulf, etc., were deities in disguise. The seeming profundity of this sort of interpretation has, however, been cruelly exploded, and the belief in these reduced or faded gods has been abandoned.

Its place has of late been taken by the belief in the so-called Märchentheorie, according to which the hero-legend consists essentially of fairy-tales mingled with historical elements. The chief representative of this theory, which is based upon Wundt's hypothesis of the fairy-tale origin of all epic poetry, is Friedrich Panzer, the author of the books on Beowulf and Siegfried. While the parallels which this method has established are frequently very striking, it has not succeeded in finding a fairy-tale which, as a whole, would correspond to any one hero-legend, and it is only by a process of summing up features contained in widely scattered material that a certain force of argument is attained. Moreover, there are numerous old Germanic hero-legends which are free from Märchen-elements, and therefore must be explained from other sources.

But even if we grant the justification of the two methods just described, all that can be obtained by them is the explanation of the presence and probable origin of certain mythological or märchenhaften elements in the hero-legends. The results thus attained are at best analytical and atomistic in character; they may show the ingredients of the poetic composition, but they fail to explain the poetic process that made artistic use of these ingredients. Least of all will the mythological or the Märchen-theory throw light upon the rise and the development of the poetic compositions which present the fusion of the Siegfried-legend and the Burgunden-saga. As the plot resulting from this fusion is the chief source of our knowledge of the Nibelungensaga, it is by a careful critical study of the evolution of the plot that, in my opinion, we may hope to solve some of the perplexing problems connected with the history of our saga.

That the Siegfriedsaga once existed as a separate légend independent of the story of the Burgundians, with which it was later combined, may be accepted as an established fact. In a previous paper (*Publications of the Mod. Lang. Ass.* Vol. XII, 461 ff.) I attempted to prove that the oldest account of the Siegfried-story, though perhaps not the entire original form of the saga, as I now believe, is contained in Beowulf, ll. 885 ff. which account afterwards, in the Scandinavian version, underwent important changes. According to this Beowulf passage, the Siegfried-legend consisted of the story of a hero, who achieved highest renown by the killing of a dragon, the guardian of a great treasure. It is of little importance that in

Beowulf our hero is called Sigmund, for Sigmund, Sigurð and Siegfried are various names of the same hero, and there seems little doubt that Siegfried's famous deed was transferred to Sigmund when through the latter the legend began to connect Siegfried with the chosen clan of the Volsungs and their special protector, Oðinn. That the story of our hero was known to more than one Germanic tribe (se waes wreccena wide maerost ofer werþeode) is made evident by the same passage in Beowulf, which, however, as yet shows no traces of a connection of this story with the historic saga of the Burgundians.

While it may forever remain impossible to find the reason *why* these two stories should have been combined, we are still in a position to study *how* they were connected. The various versions of the combined story which we possess, i. e. the story of Siegfried and the story of the Burgundians, represent in my opinion, various attempts at a fusion of both legends. The earliest and most imperfect of these attempts is contained in the version given in the Edda and in the Volsungasaga; a second one we may observe in the crude form of the Seifridlied and in the fragments of Low German songs imbedded in the Thidreksaga, and the third and most artistic one we possess in the Nibelungenlied. Not until the artistic union of the legends has been attained is the poetic imagination set at ease, and the Nibelungensaga ceases to attract the poets during the subsequent centuries.

It will be the purpose of the present paper to make a study of these various attempts at a fusion, the historic documents of which are the versions named before, to inquire into the means which, in the process of the artistic evolution of the saga, were employed by the poetic imagination, and, if possible, in this way to shed light on some of the unsolved problems connected with the saga.

All the versions of the story agree in letting Siegfried, after he has slain the dragon, appear at the court of the Burgundians where he woos and wins the sister of King Gunther. According to all the versions Siegfried is murdered by the hand of, or with the knowledge of certain members of the Royal Burgundian family, and according to two of the versions the final destruction of the Burgundians is due to this murder of Siegfried, though the versions differ in their statements concerning the motives which lead to the annihilation of the Burgundians.

There is no question in my mind that the story of the treacherous murder of Siegfried by jealous or avaricious relatives, who covet his treasure, was an essential part of the original Siegfried-legend. To be sure, the oldest account of the legend preserved in Beowulf, does not mention the story of the murder. The explanation is that the singer who improvises a lay on Beowulf's adventure thinks of Sigmund-Siegfried's most famous deed, his dragon fight. There is no occasion to speak of his murder. But our "scop" knew, as l. 879 shows, of feuds and *treacheries* (*fahðe* and *fyrena*) in connection with his hero, and the subsequent phrase *æfter deaðdæge* (l. 885), unless a mere commonplace, may well refer to the widely known fact of the treacherous murder.

The story of a glorious hero murdered by treacherous relatives on the one hand, and the story of the annihilation of the Burgundians through Attila on the other hand—this was the material which the poets found before them. And we are still in a position to observe their imagination at work, combining the two legends and weaving a new story, especially in the Edda version, which I shall discuss first.

Leaving aside the mythological embellishments of the story, which are evidently later Scandinavian inventions, the original form of the new narrative, according to this version, was about as follows: Siegfried, after the dragon fight, journeys to the court of Gunther where he marries Gudrun, the latter's sister. He then assists Gunther in suing for the hand of Brynhild, the sister of Attila. To win her, the two must resort to some sort of deception. Discovering the fraud and being jealous of Siegfried, whom she secretly loves, Brynhild causes his death. Having accomplished her revenge, she kills herself, and is burned on the funeral pyre with Siegfried. Hostilities now ensue between the Burgundians and Attila, as he holds them responsible for the death of his sister. He is finally pacified by the promise of the hand of Gudrun, Siegfried's widow. At first Gudrun refuses, but she is given a potion, which causes her to forget Siegfried. After a time Attila, who covets Siegfried's hoard, now in the possession of Gunther, invites him to his court. Knowing her husband's treacherous designs, Gudrun sends her brothers a warning, but they fail to heed it and meet their death. To avenge them she kills her two sons, and at a banquet she gives Attila their blood to drink and

their hearts to eat. In the night, when Attila, drunk and defenseless, is asleep, she plunges a sword into his heart and sets fire to the castle, in which he and all his retainers are consumed.

From the account just given, it appears quite clearly that the invention of the character of Gudrun, the Kriemhilt of the German versions, is the first and most important link, by which the Siegfriedsaga and the story of the Burgundians were joined together. What furnished the historical basis for the creation of this character has long been recognized in the fact that Attila, according to Jordanis, *De origine actibusque Getarum*, Cap. 49, died during the night following his wedding to a girl named Ildico, which is the latinized form of German Hildikô. We can still observe how the legend transformed this historical fact. While Attila, in Jordanis' account, succumbs to a natural death, the legend has him die by the hand of his wife. She kills him to avenge the murder of her brothers, for the legend also invents a motive for her act by making her the sister of the Burgundian kings.

The character of Gudrun, as the above account shows, furnishes, however, still another link in the creation of the new narrative. We are told that before she became the wife of Attila she was married to Siegfried, the famous slayer of the dragon, who, accordingly, had to appear at the court of Gunther to ask for her hand. I am convinced that the invention of Gudrun's marriage to Siegfried was a device of the legend subsequent to the invention of her marriage to Attila. In fact the *Atlakviða*, one of the oldest Edda lays, which presents the earliest poetic version of the fall of the Burgundians and of Gudrun's revenge, has as yet no knowledge of her marriage to Siegfried. I conclude that the marriage-motive, so successfully employed in explaining the annihilation of the Burgundians, is repeated for the purpose of connecting the Siegfried-legend with the story of the Burgundians. Such retrogressive growth of the legend, by which I mean the subsequent development of the antecedent history of a hero or his ancestors, is a not unfrequent phenomenon in the evolution of the hero-legend. It has its psychological basis in the general inclination, common to the hero-legend of most nations, to trace back the events and characters of their national past into the remotest periods of antiquity and, if possible, to the mythological beginnings of things.

In the present case the legend starts with the fact that Gudrun is the wife of Attila, and, in order to combine the Siegfried-legend with the story of the Burgundians, already fixed, invents a previous marriage of Gudrun. At the same time it became necessary to explain and to excuse this invention. Consequently we are told in the Scandinavian version that Gudrun was given a magic potion before she became Attila's wife, and in the Nibelungenlied we hear that Kriemhilt consents to marry the King of the Huns because she is thereby given an opportunity of avenging Siegfried's death. While thus in the Nibelungenlied a sufficient reason is given for Kriemhilt's second marriage, no such motive is suggested by the Scandinavian version, since here Gudrun, after her marriage to Attila, avenges her *brothers* and not her former husband. I conclude, therefore, that the potion, which is to make her forget Siegfried, is a poor, though early device to find an excuse for the two marriages of Gudrun, a device dating back to the time when the first attempt was made to connect the Siegfried-legend with the story of the Burgundians, with Gudrun as the wife of Attila. In other words: the Siegfried-legend was combined with the story of the Burgundians at a period when the historical facts of their annihilation and the subsequent sudden death of Attila had been transformed into a saga, in which Gudrun, the avenger of her brothers, had become the central figure. The earliest trace of this transformation is found in Marcellinus Comes who, writing between 518 and 534, relates that Attila rex Hunnorum Europae orbator provinciae *noctu mulieris manu, cultroque confoditur*.

It seems quite improbable, therefore, that the combination of the two legends in question took place previous to the middle of the sixth century.

One of the most important manifestations of the poetic imagination is the invention of the *μύθος*, (*σύνθεσις τῶν πραγμάτων*) as Aristotle calls it, or the "Fabel" (plot) as it is named in German. By this I understand the joining together of characters and actions or events into the organic unity of the epic or the drama, in conformity with the laws of cause and effect. I have thus far been trying to show how gradually, upon the basis of two given legends, a new "Fabel" is developing out of the combination of the two sagas. Before I proceed further I wish to point out as a characteristic feature of this new "Fabel" that it transforms, into family

affairs and feuds, events of history, and that from the personal relations thus established result the poetic motives which actuate the characters. It is owing to the absence of the historical viewpoint that the memory of the great actual occurrences of history, upon which the Germanic hero-legend is doubtlessly based, has almost entirely vanished, and at best only the names of the historical personages, as in the case of Attila and Gunther, have been preserved. Hence the difficulty of tracing the heroic characters of the saga to their prototypes in history, a difficulty which becomes especially great in the case of the Siegfried story, the historical basis of which seems to lie in the time prior to the migrations of the German peoples.

Nor are the poetic motives which incite the characters and cause the action of the new plot definitely established or arranged with the idea of an organic unity. On the whole it may be said that the Scandinavian version of the Nibelungen story shows the saga in the state of evolution in which both "Fabel" and motives are still being invented and combined.

It is at this point where I disagree with those investigators who consciously or unconsciously assume the preexistence of a complete and uniform saga from which the single poets drew their material. Aside from the fact that this assumption lacks all documentary basis, it is disproved by the very nature of the song material of the Edda which, in its oldest and best specimens, is that of the single, independent heroic lay complete in itself. Had the authors of these single lays been bound by the fixed tradition of a complete saga, the confusion of motives and the numerous contradictions in the structure of the new "Fabel" would be inexplicable. They will, however, become intelligible if we recognize the fact that the singers were free to combine certain legendary elements, to add to them and to embellish them and thus gradually to create the whole of the saga, which in its artistically completed form we possess in the Nibelungenlied.

Viewed in the light of these observations, the problematical character of Brynhild, too, may become more intelligible. That she, like Gudrun, serves as an important link in the chain which binds the Siegfried-legend to the story of the Burgundians is clear at the first glance. Is she, like her great rival and antagonist, the product of motive-finding imagination, or is she, though there is

no trace of her in history, a character which originally belonged to one or the other of the two legends?

There are, in the Norse version, clearly distinguishable two conflicting accounts concerning Brynhild, the one ascribing to her human ancestry, the other seeing in her a mythological being. To the careful reader of the sources, unbiased by mythological theories and predilections, there can be little doubt as to the authenticity of the first account, according to which Brynhild is the daughter of Buple and Attila's sister. Not only is her relationship to Attila claimed in two of the oldest Siegfried lays of the Edda, the *Brot af Sigorþarkvípa* (8¹, 14¹) and the *Sigorþarkvípa en skamma* (15², 30¹, 55⁵, 69⁴), but also in the productions of later poetasters such as the *Gripesspá* (27³) and the *Helreið Brynhilder* (4¹) in which the confusion resulting from her supposed mythological origin has already set in. To be sure, no historical fact warrants this version of her descent, but it is evident that Brynhild serves here as a second link to bind together the two legends. She is needed as such for the purpose of furnishing a motive for Attila's treacherous invitation to the Burgundians and for their subsequent destruction. Again it is in two of the oldest lays that this motivation appears. It is implied in the prophesy of the raven in *Brot af Sigkv.* 5:

Ykr mon Atle eggjar rjóða

and clearly expressed in Attila's reproach, *Atlamál* 52 (Sijmons):

sendoþ systr heljo: slíks ek mest kennomk

In view of the fact that the version of the fall of the Burgundians contained in the Attila lays corresponds to the facts of history more closely than any other poetic account of the same story and is, therefore, of great antiquity, I conclude that the invention of the motive for Attila's revenge is equally old. A product of the poetic imagination, the character of Brynhild is at the same time endowed with traits which are foreign to the nature of Germanic womanhood, traits which may, however, have had their prototype in the environment of the semibarbarian ruler of the Huns. The family resemblance between the voluptuous, jealous, and revengeful virago and the avaricious, treacherous, and ferocious Atle of the Edda lays is indeed unquestionable, and there seems strong justification, therefore, for the assumption that the uncanny woman, whose career is thus summed up by Hagen: "she has been born ever to evil, a grief to the heart of many a man,"¹ played a

rôle in the story of the fall of the Burgundians *before* it was connected with the Siegfried-legend.

However, soon after the poetic combination of the two legends had begun, Brynhild was assigned an additional rôle in the new "Fabel"; she was to cause the death of Siegfried. If, as I believe, Brynhild's connection with the murder of Siegfried presents a later development of the "Fabel," then we must assume the existence of an earlier version of the plot which accounted for Siegfried's death in a different way. Such a version we undoubtedly have in *Gubrunarkviða* II 3, in which Gudrun accuses her brothers of the murder of Siegfried because "they begrudged me a husband who was foremost of all." She could not have given this reason for the crime had Brynhild already figured as the instigator of it. If there was, however, a time in the development of the Nibelungen story when Brynhild, who belongs originally to the Attila-legend, had not yet made her fatal entry into Siegfried's destiny, then all the stories of her previous betrothal to the hero, of her following him to the funeral pyre etc. must be pronounced later inventions.

Nowhere does the unfinished and fluctuating state of the new "Fabel" become more apparent than in the various accounts concerning Brynhild. Had this character been an old, essential part of the Siegfried-legend, as most scholars believe, these various and conflicting accounts could not have been possible, owing to the deep-rooted conservatism of ancient folk-lore. If, on the other hand, the imagination of the poets was unfettered by conservative tradition when shaping this character, a multiformity of statements and versions would result. Here, if anywhere, may we observe how the poets were the creators of new sagas.

Their principal effort in this direction, still traceable in its various steps, is the gradual creation of the valkyrie myth in connection with Gunther's wooing of Brynhild. According to the account of *Sg. sk.* 37-39, supported by similar passages in *Odrúnargrátr* 17 and in *Völsungasaga*, Chap. 29, 7 ff. (Ranisch), the Giukings and Siegfried were besieging Attila's castle in order to win Brynhild, his sister, by force if necessary. Finding himself hard pressed, Attila concludes to submit and threatens to disinherit Brynhild

¹ *Sg. sk.* 45: hón kröng of kvamsk fyr kné móþor
 hón's æ boren óvilja til
 mǫrgom manne at móþtrega.

if she will not consent to the marriage. She deliberates for a time whether she should follow Buþle's advice and become a wishmaid (óskmær)² and fell warriors, or acquiesce in Attila's demand. Attracted by Siegfried's appearance and still more by his gold, she consents to a compromise, hoping she might win his love. By the deceit and scheming of Attila, however, she is finally compelled to marry Gunther. Neither a previous acquaintance or meeting with Siegfried, nor the notorious marriage by proxy of later accounts, is mentioned in this story. Attila is the cause of all the woe that befell her, as Brynhild tells us herself in *Gubrunarkviþa I*, 24 ff.:

'Veldr einn Atle ǫllo þólve,
 of borenn Buþla, bróþer minn,
 þás vit í hǫll húnskrar þjóðar
 eld á jǫfre ormbæjs lítom.
 þess hefk ganga goldet síþan
 þeirar synar sǫmk ey.

Consumed with jealousy and sensual desire at the sight of Siegfried's conjugal happiness³ she instigates Gunther to the murder of Siegfried.

This homely tale which presents the earliest motivation of Brynhild's connection with Siegfried's death evidently did not satisfy later poets of a romantic and mythologic bent of mind. The first change which they introduced was to transform Brynhild, the wishmaid and sister of Attila, into a valkyrie. This transformation would suggest itself all the more easily since the occupation of the wishmaids, who were a sort of Germanic Amazons such as the Romans, according to Cassius Dio,⁴ found fully armed among the dead of the battlefield, coincided with the activity ascribed to the Valkyries. Hence we hear in a later Edda lay that Brynhild is one of the wishmaids of Óþinn, who, stung by his sleep thorn and clad in full armor, lies asleep on a mountain and is surrounded by a wall of fire (vafrløge). Here she rests until Siegfried with the help of his steed Grane rides through the flames and awakens her, whereupon they pledge their troth.

² Oðrúnargrátr 15.

³ The same motive crops out in the Nibelungenlied (592 Lachm.) when Brünhilt weeps as she sees Kriemhilt sitting next to Siegfried at the wedding feast.

⁴ Cassius Dio, Epitome 71, 3, 2: ἐν μέντοι τοῖς νεκροῖς τῶν βαρβάρων καὶ

Whether or not the new motive was fashioned after the story of Dornröschen or some similar fairy-tale, its introduction created endless confusion in the "Fabel" as it had developed up to that time. Since the poets who cultivated the new motive were, on the whole, mediocre talents, no longer sharing the naïve mythological beliefs of the heroic age and lacking the plastic power of constructing a new uniform "Fabel," which would displace the old plot, we notice that the old and the new tale are intermingled or run side by side, with the result that Brynhild, to the despair of the interpreters, has from now on a double. A classical example of this confusion is the much discussed poem *Helreið Brynhildar* in which the ogress recognizes and addresses her as *Buþla dóttir*, while Brynhild in reply chides her ignorance and tells her the valkyrie story. Another method of dovetailing the two versions was to transfer the *vafroge* from the mountain of the sleeping valkyrie to Brynhild's castle. For obvious reasons this could not be Attila's castle, so a foster-father and brother-in-law, named Heimir, had to be invented, near whose home Brynhild occupies a hall (*salr*) surrounded by the portable fireworks which seemingly are set off whenever a suitor appears.

Still greater became the confusion of motives and contradictory statements when Brynhild's mythological double began to share the responsibility for Siegfried's tragic death in the remodelled new "Fabel." It will be seen that on the whole it resulted also in an important change in Siegfried's character. Not to its advantage, for no longer is Attila, as formerly, the cause of all the woe, but Siegfried, whose faithlessness and deceit bring about the final catastrophe.

I have already stated that, in my opinion, Brynhild's connection with the murder of Siegfried presents a later invention of the saga, superceding the older version according to which Siegfried fell by the hands of avaricious relatives who covet his treasure. Not only is this the version of the *Seifriedlied* and of several passages of the *Nibelungenlied*,⁵ but also of *Gupr. I*, 21, and of *Sig. sk.* 16, where Gunther expresses it in unmistakable terms when he says to Hagen:

Vildu okr fylke	til fear véla
gótt's at raða	Rínar malme

γυναικῶν σώματα ὠπλισμένα ἐνρέθη. Inter interfectos barbaros etiam mulieres repertae sunt armatae.

⁵ Nibelungenlied (L.) 717, 813, 934.

ok unande auþe stýra
ok sitjande saélo njóta.

The fact that the motive of the avaricious relatives persistently recurs in documents separated from one another by centuries, proves how deep-rooted the tradition must have been. That the relatives who caused Siegfried's death became identical with Gudrun's brothers seems only natural after Siegfried had been connected with the Burgundian family through his marriage.

With the entrance of Brynhild, however, an important change takes place. She, now, becomes the instigator of the murder, which the brothers commit at her behest, and as long as she is considered merely as Attila's sister, avarice and jealousy, resulting from unrequited love, are the motives which prompt her. As soon, however, as the wishmaid at Attila's court was transformed into a valkyrie, these motives must have seemed crude and unsatisfactory in their undisguised frankness. A more dignified cause for her jealousy than mere sensual desire had to be found, and the story of a previous betrothal was invented. Inasmuch as the valkyrie myth was not able, as we have seen above, to displace the tradition of Brynhild's human origin, we hear in fact of two betrothments of Siegfried, one to the valkyrie on the mountain and one to Brynhild, the sister of Attila. The details, with which the story of the last betrothal is told in the *Völsungasaga* on the basis of Edda lays now lost, clearly show the influence due to the rise of German chivalrous poetry, as do also the various efforts of exalting the character of Brynhild and of casting the entire blame upon Siegfried. While it is difficult to separate what belongs to the age of old heroic poetry from the later romantic elements because of their close admixture, it is not impossible to detect the latter elements even in some of the oldest lays. The story of the strong maiden living in a castle surrounded by a magic wall of flames, through which only Siegfried can ride, the marvellous steed which alone can perform this feat, the miraculous disguise of Siegfried, due to his having changed forms with Gunther, and the account of the remarkable marriage by proxy, during which our hero passes three nights at Brynhild's side, placing, however, his wonderful sword between them as a bar of separation—⁶ all disclose a delight in the

⁶ I fear that Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* 168 ff. was mistaken in considering this feat of self-inflicted asceticism an ancient Germanic custom. The oldest passages which he is able to quote in support of his theory outside

miraculous and the fanciful, which has its parallels in chivalrous poetry, but which is foreign to the austere simplicity of motivation of primitive heroic poetry. Neither the Attila lays nor the oldest strophes of the *Brot af Sigkv.* need the aid of the supernatural or the fabulous to attain their poetic grandeur.

The efforts of later poets to explain and to mitigate the realistic expression of the motive of jealousy in the older sources, did not entirely succeed, however. Through the superficial veneer of courtly demeanor Brynhild's original nature bursts forth when, hearing that her revengeful designs were carried into effect, she laughs aloud at Gudrun's frantic grief or, when seeing the wounds of the slain Siegfried "fire is kindled in her eyes and she spirts venom from her mouth." In the face of such outbreaks of truculent passion the stories of her subsequent melodramatic sorrow and of her spectacular suicide seem weak and artificial. They belong without question to a time when the creative power of heroic poetry was already very much on the decline.

In conclusion, the question suggests itself whether the valkyrie myth and the various tales sprung from it are of Scandinavian or of German origin. In proof of the latter assumption it is pointed out that the Thidreksaga, while lacking the vafroge and other miraculous incidents, has an account not only of Brynhild's betrothal to Siegfried but also of the deceitful marriage by proxy. As no other German source knows, however, of a previous meeting between Brynhild and Siegfried, much less of a betrothal, the account of the Thidreksaga must be dismissed as one of the cases in which the compiler of the saga followed Scandinavian reports. Not so, however, in the case of the story of the happenings in the bridal chamber which, in a somewhat modified form, appears also in the Nibelungenlied. In view of the fact that the

of those from the Edda and the Volsungasaga are all taken from poems belonging to the age of chivalry, such as Tristan and Isolde, Orendel and Wolfdietrich. The fact that the custom is mentioned in the Talmud (S. Singer, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Volkskunde* 2, 299) and that it occurs in oriental fairy-tales seems to point to the Orient as its real source. From here it may have migrated westward during the crusades to the delight of perverse chivalrous society. It is, moreover, quite significant that neither Brynhild nor Frau Bride in Orendel know of this supposed old custom, for both ask in naïve diasppointment what their bedmates mean by the strange performance. The similarity of the two scenes in the bridal chamber is indeed so striking that one feels impelled to conjecture some sort of an indebtedness on the part of the Edda poet.

coarse humor of this story is in the taste of early German minstrel poetry, many scholars are of the opinion that it was invented and spread by gleemen. Like other portions of the Nibelungen saga, it was in all probability carried to Norway at the time when the valkyrie myth was in the making and there transformed, after the model of similar tales in the legends of Tristan and of Orendel, into the story of Siegfried having passed several nights at Brynhild's side with a sword between them. Traces of the original minstrel story we find, however, in the fact that Brynhild, according to *Gripesspá* 47 and *Völsungasaga* Chap. 29, accuses Siegfried of having robbed her of her *meydomr*.

While thus the Thidreksaga does disprove rather than establish the existence of the Valkyrie myth in Germany, most scholars believe that a large, bed-shaped rock on top of the Feldberg in the Taunus mountains, which in a document of the year 1043 is mentioned as lapis qui vulgo dicitur lectulus Brunihilde, corroborates the story of the valkyrie, sleeping on a mountain and surrounded by a wall of flames, which is told in the lay *Sigrdrifomól*. In the absence of evidence other than that existing in the imagination of those who make this assertion, it seems well to recall to one's mind the caution, with which no less an authority than Wilhelm Grimm (*Heldensage*,³ 169) viewed the legendary names of places and localities such as Sifritsbrunnē, Hagenbrunno, Brünhildenstein etc. as trustworthy sources of our knowledge of the hero legend. If the lectulus Brunihilde in question was at all named after our Brynhild it was on account of its shape and size, and the name would, therefore, prove only that she was known in the middle of the 11th century, the very time when minstrel poetry flourished, as an amazon of extraordinary figure and strength. Moreover, the term lectulus which often means lectulus matrimonialis might well be a witty allusion to the ludicrous scene in Brynhild's bridal chamber about which the gleemen were fond of singing.

II

An attempt, apparently old and simple, of combining the legend of Siegfried with the story of the Burgundians is contained in the so-called Seifridlied, a popular ballad preserved in much deteriorated form in several prints of the 16th century. As it is the purpose of the present study to follow the growth of the Nibelungensaga only from the point of view of the history of the "Fabel,"

a critical discussion of the many problems, which the text and the incredibly confused composition of the ballad offer, must be excluded. Nor can the question be considered here whether the poem represents a certain form of a presumed Erlösungs- and Werbungssage or not. The very fact that we have in this ballad, which consists of two distinct divisions, partly contradictory in contents, a form of the plot, and hence of the saga, which differs from that of the various Scandinavian versions as well as from that of the Nibelungenlied, precludes the theory of a preexisting, definitely established legend. Divesting the story of the Seifridlied from the mass of fabulous embellishments which in the course of time were added, we arrive at the following: Siegfried rescues Kriemhilt, the daughter of King Gibich of Worms, by slaying the dragon who had carried her to a mountain where he guards both the maiden and a large treasure. Returning with her to King Gibich's court he marries her, but is finally killed by her brothers who are jealous of his political power and covet his treasure.

It has been frequently pointed out that the similarities between the descriptions of Siegfried's dragon fight in this ballad and in Beowulf make it highly probable that the present ballad goes back to an original of great antiquity. There are other features of the story which seem to confirm this view. The absence of the character of Brynhild and the fact that Siegfried's murderer, Hagen, still appears as one of Kriemhilt's brothers, disclose a form of the "Fabel" which antedates at least the plot of the Nibelungenlied, great as otherwise the influence of this poem may have been on the Seifridlied in numerous details. I see in the "Fabel" of the lost original lay a very old attempt at combining the Siegfried legend with the story of the Burgundians, an attempt, the purpose of which is quite obvious. Siegfried's greatest deed is chosen to bring about the connection of the stories. By slaying the dragon he obtains both Kriemhilt and the treasure. The invention of this story, which deviates essentially from all the other versions, would not have been possible had there been a definitely established tradition of how Siegfried was to win Kriemhilt, or had the character of Brünhilt been an original part of the Siegfried-legend.

While the purpose and the method of the composition of the plot of the Seifridlied may still be discerned, the question, nevertheless,

remains how the strange story could have originated. The advocates of a preestablished Erlösungssage will, of course, see in the Seifrid story a confirmation of their theory. But even if we accept R. C. Boer's and Friedrich Panzer's interpretation of Fáfniðmál 41-42 and of Grípesspó 14, according to which the maiden sleeping on the mountain is really Gudrun the daughter of Giuki, and is identical with the Kriemhilt of the Seifridlied, who is held in captivity on a mountain by the dragon, we do not escape the realm of the miraculous. Paradoxical as it may sound, of the two stories, the one told in the Seifridlied is, despite its phantastical elements, the more reasonable from a human point of view, for, if the enchanted maiden described by the birds in Fáfniðmál is really Gudrun, she must be a valkyrie; and what has been said above in criticism of the Scandinavian valkyrie myth concerning Brynhild must then be applied also in the case of Gudrun. The story of the rape of a maiden by a dragon or griffin has, on the other hand, many parallels in folk lore, especially in so-called Entführungssagen, where the dragon, who jealously guards the maiden, can easily be recognized as a symbol of the father or rival opposed to the suitor.⁷

I venture to suggest that the Seifridlied is a late and greatly deteriorated version of an old lay which told how Siegfried, under extraordinary circumstances, heroically rescued and won a maiden guarded either by her father or by a powerful abductor who afterwards treacherously caused his murder. A lay such as this may well have been sung of Arminius, the liberator of Germany and greatest hero of German antiquity who, according to Tacitus *Annales* I, 55,⁸ abducted Thusnelda,⁹ the daughter of Segestes, his political adversary, through whose hatred and treachery he afterwards fell.

⁷ Discussing this symbolic meaning of the dragon Wilhelm Müller in his *Mythologie der deutschen Heldensage* 75 ff. points out the identity of the jealous father and the dragon in a number of legends. See also, O. Jänicke, *Deutsches Heldenbuch* 4, xli ff.

⁸ *Ann.* 1, 55: Segestes . . . auctis privatim odiis, quod Arminius filiam ejus alii partam rapuerat: gener invisus inimici soceri; quaeque apud concordēs vincula caritatis, incitamenta irarum apud infensos erant.

⁹ According to R. Much, *Anzeiger f.d. Allert.* 36, 205 the second part of the name Thusnelda is Germanic heldi(z)=Hilde, while the first part is to be explained by O. N. þausn. þausk, þyss "Getümmel" or þeysa, þysia "vorfürststürmen."

When, later, the Siegfried-legend was combined with the story of the Burgundians, Gudrun-Kriemhilt, the daughter of the Burgundian king, took the place of the kidnapped maiden of the old lay, while at a subsequent period, when the dragon symbol had replaced the irate father or rival, the combination between the dragon-fight and the rescue of the maiden, discussed above, was made. It is significant to note in this connection that according to the Danish Siegfriedslied (Rassmann, *Deutsche Heldensage*, 1, 300; W. Grimm, *Altdänische Heldenlieder*, 31), Brynhild (Gudrun?) was placed on the mountain by her father because he did not wish her to get married. Moreover, it is equally significant that the dragon in the Seifridlied is in reality an enchanted man, who, according to strophes 21 and 25, rests with his head in the maiden's lap and announces that as soon as he has regained his human form he will take her magthumb, or, in other words, make her his wife. Commenting on the similarities of the two stories, W. Müller, *Mythologie der deutschen Heldensage* 77 ff. remarks: "Nehmen wir hinzu, dass der die Tochter hütende Vater [in anderen Sagen] merhfach als ein grimmiger Heide geschildert wird, wie Macharel im Ortnit, Aaron im Oswald, so werden wir ungeachtet der verschiedensten geographischen und historischen Anknüpfungen, welche in den einzelnen Sagen bemerklich sind . . . in dem angeblichen Vater nur den eifersüchtigen Hüter der Jungfrau sehen, der sie selbst zur Gattin haben will, so dass wir hier dieselbe Gestalt erkennen, welche . . . im Siegfriedliede als der vom Helden bekämpfte Drache erscheint, der nach Kriemhilt's Besitze strebt."

The combination of the Siegfried-legend and the story of the Burgundians attained its final shape in the "Fabel" of the Nibelungenlied. Here, as in the versions mentioned thus far, Kriemhilt is the connecting link between the two legends. In accordance with the chivalrous character of this epic poem, little is told of Siegfried's dragon fight. Kriemhilt, too, appears as a court lady of the 12th century, and Siegfried's courtship is described with the subdued colors of the Minnesong. The refined circles of twelfth century society evidently would no longer tolerate the old story of how Siegfried won her by slaying the dragon. Nevertheless the gigantic characters and the wild passions of the old heroic age loom in their former grandeur behind the pomp of

courtly ceremonial, especially in the second part of the *Nibelungenlied*. For Kriemhilt is the connecting link also between the Burgundians and Attila, who annihilates them because Kriemhilt seeks revenge for the murder of Siegfried. No longer do we hear of Brynhild, the sister of Attila, whose death the King of the Huns avenges. Kriemhilt has become the centre of the entire plot, and in consequence her character has risen to overtowering greatness. An account of the year 1131, which mentions the existence of a song treating of Kriemhilt's *notissima erga fratres perfidia* seems to indicate that the transformation of the "Fabel" with Kriemhilt as the central figure of the epic had been accomplished at the beginning of the 12th century.

Whatever the causes of this change may have been, it is certain that the sympathies of the German poets, whether for ethical or for patriotic reasons, were with the character of Kriemhilt far more than with that of the Hunnish princess. Compared with the Scandinavian version, her rôle in the *Nibelungenlied* is, in consequence, rather limited. In fact she only seems needed to cause the death of Siegfried, after which she drops out of sight. Moreover, the description of the land over which she rules and of her surroundings is so colorless and vague that we can still notice the effort which it cost the poet to localize her. The claim of the orthodox believers in a Brynhild myth that the original features of her character had been forgotten at the time when the *Nibelungenlied* was written, is evidently but a makeshift. The real explanation of the haze which enshrouds the character of Brunhilt in the *Nibelungenlied* is to be found in the shifting of motives which characterizes the evolution of the "Fabel." While at an earlier period in the development of the saga which reflects more faithfully the facts of history, the character of Brunhilt, Attila's sister, seemed necessary to explain the annihilation of the Burgundians, this motive was dropped as soon as Kriemhilt's revenge became the motive for the fall of her brothers. Brunhilt might thus have been entirely eliminated from the new "Fabel" had it not been for her relations to Siegfried, which, at an earlier period of the fusion of both legends, had also been developed. Brunhilt, the sister of Attila, is forgotten, but the memory of her connection with Siegfried's death survives.

The treatment of this tragic event in the *Nibelungenlied* still further supports my contentions. It is obvious that it had to

be emphasized far more than in the other versions if it was to furnish the motive for Kriemhilt's revenge. But, although Brunhilt plans the murder, the original motive of the jealousy and greed of the Burgundians is not forgotten. Siegfried is killed not only because Brunhilt has determined his death, but also because Gunther and Hagen covet his treasure. And strangest of all: while we expect that Kriemhilt should direct her revenge first of all against Brunhilt as the prime instigator of the crime, she turns her hatred against Hagen and Gunther, who had only been the tools of Brunhilt. It seems to me evident from the fact that Brunhilt is thus overlooked and entirely dropped, that the poet, after all, subconsciously followed the old tradition of the murder through treacherous and avaricious relatives.

Summing up my observations, we arrive at the following results: The so-called Nibelungensaga, by which I understand the story of Siegfried and the Burgundians, is a combination of both legends. The history of the Siegfried-legend is the history of the shifting and moulding of motives and characters, by which this legend is blended with the story of the Burgundians. Since all the versions of the combined legends show the tendency of developing such motives and characters, it would be an absolute mistake to see in any one of these versions the original form of the combined story. A combined story never existed outside of, or independent of the versions which have come down to us. It lived only in these versions, each of which represents a different attempt to connect the two legends, which, prior to these attempts, stood in no relation to one another.

While we may look for the original form of the story of the Burgundians in the facts of history, no historical basis of equal certainty can as yet be assigned to the Siegfried legend, although there are indications which strongly point to Siegfried's identity with Arminius. The oldest form of the legend of Siegfried is contained in the account given in *Beowulf*. To this story of the Dragon fight, doubtlessly symbolic of an extraordinary heroic achievement, there must, however, be added the event recorded in the original version of the *Seifridlied* as well as the fact of Siegfried's tragic death. The oldest version of his death was that of his murder by treacherous and avaricious relatives.

Concerning the links which bind the two legends together, we notice a state of fluctuation and change. Kriemhilt as well as

Brunhilt are characters created by the poetic imagination for the purpose of combining both legends. The history of changes which these characters undergo is the history of the fusion of both legends into one work of art. Before the final and most artistic combination was accomplished, we must assume the existence of single lays in which poets of various talents and at various times treated various parts of the combined story, or the combined story as a whole, with great freedom. Such freedom is shown in the transformation of motives and of certain characters, a license which would have been impossible had the motives and characters been guarded by conservative, fixed tradition.

It is evident from the preceding discussion that it will be chiefly the business of philological criticism to reconstruct out of the various versions of our legends their historical development as I have attempted to mark out. Thus there should be eliminated by the critical method all mythological elements in apparently late and artificial productions of the Edda, such as *Gríppspó*, *Reginsmól*, *Fáfnismól*, *Sigrdrífomól* and *Helreið Brynhildar*. At the same time new light will be thrown upon the question concerning the age of the various manuscripts of the Nibelungenlied. Lachmann's idea of reconstructing the old lays which constitute the basis of the Nibelungenlied may be revived on a new foundation, for we shall possess a criterion by which we can determine the age and the authenticity of the various songs. Since all of these songs tended, however, toward the fusion of both legends, and hence there must have been poets who treated the combined stories as an artistic whole, prior to the existence of the Nibelungenlied, new light will be shed on the authorship of this epic.

We shall finally be in a position also to determine with approximate certainty the age of the various versions of the Nibelungen-saga. Thus it would seem beyond doubt that the Edda version, with its confusion of motives and characters, presents a very early period in the combination of the two legends. During this period, which we assume to have been not earlier than the 8th century, the stories in their incomplete state of fusion as reflected in the oldest Edda lays seem to have been carried to Scandinavia.

JULIUS GOEBEL